Abby Mann's "King" NBC-TV 2/12/78 ff

First show:

The opener is the violence of 3/28/68. It is factually incorrect and entirely without context. Even so simple a matter as the flight to a motel is not faithful. Nor is there any indication of the place to which King went - or was taken. This is significant because of the later disclosure that Hoover planned a campaign about King's going to a white-owned motel. It is significant because the Invaders do not figure in it at all. And it is significant because it is unfair to the police, which resulted in the unfairness to King by the FBI. It is the police that refused to take King to his choice, the Peabody, because the area was not considered safe. The police selected the Rivermont and their judgement was excellent. Then Mann is grossly unfair and factually incorrect in omitting what King did at the Rivermont, what he said and planned, and portraying him as merely broken, lost and afraid. This matter of the riot and the flight from the scene of it and the absence of protrayal of the property damage that did result and the arrests and injuries denies context for the assassination.

Mann's ignorance of fact and misrepresentation of the actual situation may have significance in the wrongheadedness that follows, clear from his promos and from the importance given to Frank Holloman in the opening credits. In these credits Holloman is represented as a major character. I did not see a credit to the actor who plays Abernathy (a very minor character in the first segment) but did see the opening credit to the actor who plays Holloman.

Perhaps minor but historically incorrect is the line put in Harrison's mouth, that his threat of demonstrations is what forced FDR to establish a fair employment practise and the FEPC. While many forces and factors undoubtedly contributed to the establishment of the FEPC what forced FDR's hand is Congressman Vito Marcantonio's legislative effort. Whether his effort would or would not have succeeded can't be known. What is certain is that a floor effort and fight over it would have been very hurtful to the FDR administration, especially because of the war and the issues in that war.

In those days I drove Marcantonio to the White House on a number of accasions. He left one after having accepted a deal FDR offered. Marcantonio had been fighting for an FEPC for some time. Finally, after much effort, he arranged to have his bill given the first number of that session, HR 1. He was elated because this made attention to it easier. It was that year that FDR told Marc that he would do what he could administratively, by appointing a commission on fair employment practises, if Marc would drop his effort to have fair employment practises legislated. This, while it gave Marc less than legislation would have given, gave him certainty of something, at least a beginning in an effort to end employment discrimination against minorities. It relieved FDR of the cost and trouble and dissention of a legislative campaign for fair employment practises.

My impression from this first segment is that Mann's major sources included Coretta and Levison, both parts, I believe, being over-written. This means, of course, that King's was underwritten. He is schizo in this segment, charismatic and concerned but always afraid and uncertain of new steps. He also is portrayed as dependent on others for his major decisions. Or, whitey was the brains.